Better Homes and Centers

Michigan Department of Social Services

Language Development

Issue 15 Winter 1988

FOSTERING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT: WHAT SHOULD I BE DOING?

By Doris Ginder
Developmental Kindergarten Teacher
Big Rapids Public Schools

Most children learn to talk and use language without anyone "teaching" them. A six year old child has learned most of the language forms and will add only a few new ones to use for the next sixty years! One basic thought to keep in mind is that children understand far more than they are able to use or talk about.

STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

30-36 months old

- understands approximately 2,400 words
- uses 425 words
- identifies action in pictures
- understands plurals and uses-s-for plurals
- carries out one and two part commands
- answers and asks questions (why?)
- tells stories that can be understood
- describes one element in a picture
- uses commands

42-48 months old

- understands 4,200 words
- uses up to 1,200 words
- uses cannot and do not
- answers "how" questions
- begins to use compound and complex sentences
- relates experiences in sequential order
- follows a three part command
- knows several songs and nursery rhymes
- understands most preschool children's stories
- questions up to 500 times per day

60 months old

- understands up to 9,600 words
  defines words in terms of use (horses to ride)
- asks questions for information

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DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Over the past 6 years I have had the pleasure of meeting with many of you; I've been in your homes, your centers and at group meetings. These experiences have been of great value to me. I have learned much about how you feel about day care and the way this Division carries out its licensing responsibility.

I've learned what you like and don't like. I have heard many of you praise the efforts of licensing consultants and yes, I've heard from some of you who think we can do better.

The point I want to make is that this type of interaction and communication is very important. I am very much interested in knowing what your perceptions are of the Division and its employees and how we carry out the State's business. What we do is governed by statutes and rules which often are very inflexible. How we do it is something we can always improve on collectively and individually.

I would be happy to consider invitations to visit your homes or centers. These visits give me the opportunity to see and discuss first hand, what is happening in day care. Your letters are also welcome. I am very much interested in your thoughts and feelings. Additionally, I hope to initiate in the near future a more formal feedback system so we know how you feel about our performance on a more regular basis.

I look forward to a continuation of open discussions and interactions with many of you.

Ted deWolf, Director
Division of Child Day Care Licensing

PLEASE REMIND PARENTS TODAY!

Social security numbers are now required for children 5 years and older who are claimed as dependents for income tax purposes beginning with the 1988 tax filing.

Parents may apply for a social security number for their child by telephone, mail, or in person. Applications are found in post offices and local social security offices.

FOSTERING LANGUAGE . . .

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- learns to control and manipulate people with language
- sentences average 6 to 6½ words in length.

Some Suggestions for Caregivers to Foster Language Development:

BE THERE!

When a child starts a conversation, he is focusing on something important to him. Whatever the topic, he is interested in communicating, and open to your response, so respond! Play a game of naming the parts, supplying a label for the object when requested, asking "what is this?" or "what does it do?" or "what is it made of?" Being responsive means answering the question or helping out or saying (sparingly) "I can't talk right now." When we are friendly and considerate, we encourage the child to share other topics with us. Interrupting what we are doing and asking the child to tell us more shows him we think that what he is saying is important. This will encourage him to elaborate, to add details, to describe. New vocabulary is practiced, and new language is learned because the thoughts are related to a topic that the child cares about.

MODEL

Provide the models for the child to imitate and then expand on what he says. DON'T POINT OUT ERRORS OR IMITATE THE MISTAKE. Simply model and expand the correct form for the child.

Example: Child says "Me go out."
Adult says "You want to go outside. I want to go too."

This again shows him that he was understood and the correct form was modeled back. The child can hear the difference and will begin to change the rules he is using. As the child's self confidence grows, he will begin to correct himself.

ENCOURAGE

Use incomplete sentences. Begin a sentence and then pause for the child to supply the missing element. This strategy helps practice vocabulary and maintains interaction at the child's level.

Ask questions to get specific information about the child's vocabulary. "What's this?" or "Where's the bird's wing?" are common types of questions we all use. Use open-ended questions to lead the way to experimentation (let's find out). Use common objects in another.

Example: "What do you think will happen if we put water in the tray in the freezer?

All the experiences of the young child in the home or center contribute to the development and expansion of his language but, the most important ingredient is that special involvement by the caregiver — YOU!

RESOURCES: LANGUAGE

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Schickendanz, Judith, *More than ABC's,* National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Bos, Bev, *Creating Time for Children to Talk,* Pre-K Today, Vol. 2., No. 4, Jan. 1988.

Cates, Myra, *Language: From Infancy to Age Five,* Pre-K Today, Vol. 2, No. 4, Jan. 1988.

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Caregivers and Parents
Watch For
Child Care America
Public TV documentary

"Who Cares for the Children?"

Wednesday, April 13, 1988 — 8 p.m.
Check local listings for the exact time and station.

Please send articles for consideration in future issues to:

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STIMULATING INFANT LANGUAGE DURING THE FIRST YEAR

By Dr. Alice Whiren, Associate Professor
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Babies are born ready to communicate. Here are some ideas you can use to encourage communication:

Respond promptly to infant's bids. If they cry, pick them up and feed, change, or play as the case may be. Babies treated like this cry less in the second year and learn to talk more readily because they have learned that you will come to their signal. Older babies (6 months or so) often give a pre cry call that sounds like a short shout or sometimes like singing when they need attention. Listen and respond to this signal and most of the post nap crying can be eliminated.

Wait until the baby has given some signal. If you anticipate every need, they won't have to communicate and you won't have the opportunity to teach them that you will come when signaled. Be aware of all their signals including grunting noises, arm waving, whimpering, and other vocalizations.

Help babies learn the give and take of conversation. When they are very young (3-4 months) they will vocalize at the same time that you talk. They are also likely to wave their arms and kick when carrying on these conversations. As the babies get older, pause to give them a turn. Then resume your speech. By the time the baby is one year old he will know that conversation requires taking turns.

Talk to babies as if they really understand, then eventually they will. Babies learn the sounds to make and the words to use from you. Look at the infant while talking. Babies babble more when people look at them and talk to them than at any other time. The speech between adults, language on television, or background language does not have this effect.

Engage in speech play. Imitate the sounds that the baby makes, then exaggerate them. Repeat the sound and change pitch. Then you can add variations. The sounds that are the easiest are made in the front of the mouth *(b, p, m, d, t, n)* combined with open vowels (*a* as in ball, *o* as in dog). Use only one or two of these combinations for each session which should last only two to three minutes. For example, just after you put the baby down for a change and she says something like "ta . . a . . ah," you say "Ta, ta, ta" while exaggerating each syllable. Wait a moment then say "Ma, Ma, ma, ma." Wait again. Usually, when babies experience this for the first time, they appear to be concentrating, looking at you quietly and seriously. If done at each diapering session, you will be very successfull in stimulating infant language. Eventually, you can add other harder sounds such as *g* in *go* and *i* in *in*.

Contrast pairs of sounds as babies become more experienced. Children between three and eight months respond well to your presentations such as "Da ba, da ba, da ba." Older infants especially enjoy turn taking as you say a sequence, and wait while they try to imitate.

Name simple actions and concrete objects. Avoid pronouns. Select words that have meaning for the baby from the beginning. For example, say "diaper" when you hold up the diaper. Say it louder with emphasis. It helps to surround the key word with silence so the baby can notice that the word *diaper* refers to some specific object. Word naming can begin at birth and continue throughout early childhood. Don't forget to use simple verbs such as hug, pat, touch, and point. In each case, demonstrate the action as you say the word and repeat both action and word with emphasis.

Name an object while moving it in front of the smaller infants. The child should be visually following the object. Later, around four months, place the object in the baby's hands when you name it. Once the child is able to sit independently, present the object and encourage him to handle it while you repeat the name. As babies can do more, they can learn more verbs such as *touch* the block, *pat* the block, *throw* the block, *stack* the block.

When the baby begins the second year, interests expand to bigger objects, such as the door, gate, car, and wagon. Always the words most successfully taught are those that are important to the baby and are a part of his or her daily life. Usually babies understand many, many words before the first word is spoken. They are able to "Find the ball" under a blanket, to "Pat the dog," or to "Get the diaper" well before they begin to speak clearly.

Helping them to acquire a shared language so that interpretation is easier is an exciting opportunity for a caregiver.

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TODDLER TALK

By Marcia Rysztak, Instructor
Lansing Community College

Twenty-month old Brian and his dad, a veterinarian, were visiting the horses at the farm. Brian's dad repeated the ritualistic ending to their frequent visits, saying, "Let's say good-bye to the horses," and waited for Brian to wave and say "bye-bye." Instead, Brian said, "Horsie, bye-bye." Excitement shone from both faces as each realized that Brian had put two thoughts together and formed his first two-word sentence.

As Brian and his dad discovered, learning language opens up vast new areas, not only for communication, but for understanding the world as well.

At age one most toddlers have a vocabulary of three "words," which are abbreviated forms of adult words and typically one or two syllables long. They focus on familiar people, such as "mama," "dada" and "doggie," (or "horsie" as in Brian's case; cherished items, "baba" for bottle); and familiar events or actions, ("up" and "bye-bye"). In addition to naming, these single words, called holophrases, also are used as an entire sentence. For example, in our technological world "beep-beep" often means, "please warm up my bottle in the microwave."

Children develop these first words by trying to imitate the words they hear. Since the fine muscles of the child's mouth are not yet well controlled, the sounds come out as "baby talk." (It won't be until many years later that all sounds are correctly made.) Modeling by adults plays an important role in language learning since the toddler has to hear correct pronunciation in order to learn to say the words clearly. Instead of imitating the toddler's baby-talk version of speech, (such as saying "wa-wa" for water), the caregiver should clearly say the correct word for the toddler to hear.

The spoken vocabulary of toddlers grows rapidly to about 20 words at 18 months and to almost 200 words at 21 months of age. Even with this explosion of words, toddlers often over-generalize, that is, use one word to stand for an entire category of objects. For example, "papa" not only stands for grandpa, but also for any man who is not "dada." In Brian's case, "horsie" stood for all large four-legged animals, so on visits to the farm, cows were also called "horsie." To help children learn the new words, simply say the correct name. Brian's dad found himself repeating endlessly, "that's a cow."

Another phase of toddler speech is called "expressive jargon," the long strings of nonsense speech sounds which resemble adult speech in rhythm, intonations, and facial expression. It is one of the most endearing characteristics of toddler's speech since it can go on for paragraphs, sounding so much like the child is very sure of what she is saying. Its purpose is to help children learn a very important feature of language: speech patterns, inflections and the give-and-take of conversations.

Around two years of age the child begins to form two word sentences, (as Brian did with "bye-bye horsie"), and enters the stage of telegraphic speech. Here the child uses only the words needed to get a message across, leaving out all of the "extra" words (modifiers, articles, etc.), much as is done in a telegram. The challenge for the caregiver is to determine whether "doggie go" means "where is the dog?," "get this dog away from me" or "I opened the gate and the dog ran away." Paying attention to the child's facial expression, body motion and voice sound should help caregivers to guess the correct sentence. If not correct, the toddler usually emphasizes the meaning by repeating, pointing or crying. From here, toddlers will begin to form 3-4 word sentences. Even in these longer sentences toddlers reduce sentence structure to only the essential words and often in a reverse word order ("why dog go?").

How does a caregiver help the toddler move through these stages and eventually produce grammatically correct sentences? The following tips should be helpful.

1. Talk, talk, talk, talk, but keep it simple. Keep the sentence length short and use complete sentences. Say "your juice is all gone" instead of "juicy gone."
2. Talk about objects, people, or actions that the toddler is seeing, touching or doing.
3. Use the real word, not baby talk. Say "blanket" not "baba" or "blankey."
4. Expand the toddlers' shortened speech so that they hear the complete sentence. When the child says "un-oh milk," say "the milk spilled."
5. Listen! Responding when the toddler talks shows that talking brings attention. Make eye contact, remain close to the child and at the child's eye level. The toddler learns to correctly form word sounds by watching how your lips move. Your facial expression and gestures help her understand meaning.
6. Encourage (but don't force) the child to use words instead of just pointing.
7. Read books with toddlers. Talking with the child about the pictures and, in general, enjoy a pleasant conversation.

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT; POSSIBLE SIGNS OF DELAY; HOW A CHILD CARE PROVIDER CAN HELP

By Celeste Gerard Malott
Speech-Language Pathologist
Saginaw Township Community Schools

Learning to speak is a gradual, complex process. The child must learn sounds, grammar, meaning of words, to listen, to use language for thinking and to express himself in a variety of situations. Children accomplish this at varying rates, and there is a wide range of what is so called "normal." Listed below are questions to be asked to determine if a child's speech and language skills are progressing within the normal range.

2-3 Years:

Does the child use 2-3 word sentences?
Does the child point to some body parts on request?
Does the child name common objects or pictures?
Does the child ask questions or ask for help with needs?
Does the child demonstrate an understanding of some word-object associations (e.g. "What do you eat with?")

3-4 Years:

Does the child converse in short (4-5 words) sentences most of the time?
Does the child use some adjectives (e.g. big, hot, etc.)?
Does the child ask questions?
Does the child tell simple stories and recite nursery rhymes or songs?
Does the child respond to commands involving two objects (e.g. "Give Mommy the paper and pencil.")
Is the child's speech understandable approximately 80% of the time?

4-5 Years:

Does the child speak in adult-like sentences?
Does the child enjoy using nonsense words at times?
Does the child tell about recent events?
Is the child's speech intelligible (e.g. very few errors)?
Can the child attend to, remember, and carry out simple directions (e.g. "Go to your room and pick up your toys.").

5-6 Years:

Does the child speak primarily in complete sentences?
Can the child carry on a conversation with other children and adults?
Does the child use some pronouns correctly (e.g. begin sentences with "I" instead of "me")?
Does the child have completely intelligible speech even though some substitutions may still be present on the sounds of /th/, /r/ and /s/?

A "yes" answer to most of the above questions indicates that the speech and language is probably progressing normally. More than one or two no answers could indicate a possible delay in speech and language development. However, these are only guidelines and children will vary.

The following are *possible* symptoms of speech, hearing or language problems:

1. The child doesn't respond to sounds in the environment.
2. The child is not saying any words by age 2.
3. The child's speech is not intelligible after age 3.
4. The child has many different articulation errors in his speech after age 4.
5. The child does not generally use correct sentence structure after age 5.
6. The child is embarrassed by his speech and/or is teased about it.
7. The child's voice quality seems abnormal when compared to other children of the same age (hoarse, nasal, too loud, too soft).
8. The child has many hesitations and repetitions in his speech after age 5 that affect his ability to communicate.
9. The child frequently requires repetition and has difficulty following verbal directions.

Seek help from a speech-language pathologist if you suspect a problem.

Listed below are some guidelines for child care

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PARENT AND PRE-SCHOOL ROLES IN LITERACY INSTRUCTION

By Sheila Fitzgerald, Professor
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Michigan State University

Do parents and child care providers have opportunities and responsibilities for children's growth in reading and writing? YES. Should they? YES.

My responses to these questions may surprise you. Parents have been reluctant to see themselves as "real teachers." Many people who care for young children have avoided literacy instruction to protect children from inappropriate pressures. Some elementary school educators have discouraged parents and pre-school teachers from dabbling in their areas of expertise.

Divisions among the adults who people the lives of little ones are unfortunate. They result from misconceptions about reading and writing that have dominated public and professional thinking about literacy development for the last three decades: that reading and writing are difficult to learn and teach; that reading and writing are sets of discrete skills that must be systematically ordered, presented and mastered; that learning to read and learning to write bear little relationship to each other, or to the other language skills of speaking and listening. Fortunately, studies on language and learning in the last two decades have disproved these ideas and given new research support to the "wholeness" of language. Unfortunately, many parents and educators are still uninformed about whole language and the body of research that supports it.

Whole language simply means that the skills of listening, speaking, writing and reading are interrelated and interdependent, that they must be taught together in contexts that are meaningful to children rather than as skills and sub-skills drilled upon for mastery.

As the basis for their studies, many researchers turned to infants to examine their growth in listening and speaking. Admitting that the power of speech is the most complex accomplishment humans achieve and that children before the age of five have the essentials of their language mastered, they noted the conditions parents create to allow such phenomenal learning to occur. Parents, indeed, are master teachers of language! What nearly all parents seem to know is that children need to take chances when they learn to speak, that they need to try to form words and sentences in their own childlike ways. Children struggle to understand the language of adults and to form their own oral utterances about things that are immediate to their experience and important to them.

What, then, did this teach researchers? First, it showed that humans learn language best in natural ways and in meaningful situations, each generation passing on language skills through a deep sense of how to teach so children will learn. Their research showed that language learning, for all its complexity, can be learned easily if appropriate conditions are created.

What does learning to speak have to do with learning to read and write? Researchers learned that children are aware of reading and writing long before they come to school. Children know "stop" when they see it on a sign at the corner and they can "read" it; — they certainly can identify "McDonalds" from the fast food's logo, and perhaps "cereal" from the box on the table at breakfast. Even more important than realizing that isolated written marks give meanings that are important to them, children whose parents read to them learn that stories and rhymes written in books are enjoyable. Stories lead to real and imagined experiences beyond the life the children are living, experiences they can think about, talk to grown-ups about, and understand better by recreating the story in their play. This, then, is really teaching the basics of reading: the interest in written language; the knowledge about life, the possible and the improbable; the ability to think about ideas in books; the need to stretch speaking abilities to talk about these new ideas. Obviously, the children who frequently heard their parents read stories and poems, who had some books of their own to love, who saw siblings and parents involved with books for their own pleasure and information, who had people to talk with about ideas from books — these proved to be the children who had the greatest possibility for success in reading and other subjects in school.

It is in the area of writing, however, that the most startling new research has challenged conventional wisdom. Most adults think that children cannot write until they are formally taught how to shape letters and how to spell words. Researchers have shown that children learn to write in much the same developmental pattern as they learn to speak: making scribbles (as in oral babbling), making pictures or gross approximations of letters to represent words or whole ideas (as in barely intelligible oral utterances) and gradually — oh so gradually — refining the composition to convey meaning accurately (as in normal speech development). Above all, as in learning to speak, children must have frequent opportunities to write for their own real purposes — and someone with whom to share their writing, someone who respects their efforts to learn.

What does this mean then for you as parents or as caregivers. First, it means that you need to see yourselves as important, on-going participants in the literacy development of children. You form the foundation blocks — children's interests in literacy, habits of reading and writing, thought processes — the structure for all future reading and writing.

You need to guard against prevailing pressures to define beginning reading as barking out the names or sounds of letters. You need to guard against pressures to define writing as learning correct manuscript printing or spelling. Fortunately, no one is taught to speak

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LANGUAGE AND SPEECH DEVELOPMENT. . .

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providers to follow when working with children who demonstrate delays in speech and language development:

- DO listen carefully to the child. Concentrate on what the child is saying, not how he says it. Use good eye contact, and show him you are interested in his ideas.
- DO be a good speech model. Speak slowly and distinctly in complete sentences. Children may imitate the way you speak.
- DO give the child plenty of chances to talk. It is through experimenting with their own speech that they will develop.
- DO listen to the child and expand on his language. Use well-formed sentences that are a little longer than his. Use new vocabulary.

  Child: "Car broke."
  Teacher: "The car is broken. It needs a new windshield."

- DO make speech and language fun for the child. Reinforce his attempts and praise him. Be patient as the child's communication skills develop.
- DON'T use "baby talk." Always articulate correctly and use correct language forms with the child.
- DON'T discuss the child's speech/language immaturities in his presence.
- DON'T force the child to talk or recite for others.
- DON'T interrupt or speak for children. Treat them with courtesy, as you would your friends.
- DON'T ask the child to say words over or constantly correct so the child is afraid to talk.
- DON'T allow teasing about or imitating of the child's articulation errors by others. Reinforce correct sounds when you hear them emerging.
- DON'T expect children to be speaking beyond their ability. Remember that many normal children will be somewhat slower in their development. Girls are often faster developing than boys.
- DON'T ask the child to "slow down," "repeat," "start over," "take your time," if he is having trouble getting the words out. Hesitations and repetition are common and expected among young children. Also, don't tell the child he is stuttering.
- DON'T correct or criticize the child's speech. If he mispronounces a word or uses incorrect grammar, just say the word or sentence correctly.
- DON'T pretend that you understand what the child is saying, when you really don't. Be honest and tell the child you don't understand what they are saying. Acknowledge the child's feeling of frustration when not understood.

PARENT AND PRESCHOOL ROLES . . .

(Continued from page 6)

in such piecemeal ways or we would all be tongue-tied and inarticulate.

Teach reading and writing at home and at pre-school to be sure! Make a variety of books available to the young, selecting those that are rich in ideas and language. Help them form habits of books — That takes years! Help children play with the ideas they have listened to, talk about ideas, act them out. Make paper, pencils and markers available for writing, and ask pre-schoolers to "read" their ideas to you — making sure you make no judgements about correctness. Write to the children so they see an adult writing, and read to them what you wrote. Date and save the children's efforts at writing; you will be amazed at the progress that seems to come naturally when children are free to learn.

Yes, celebrate with children the excitement of reading and writing. The attitudes and habits you help children develop are the best teaching of literacy, ones that should continue from what you ably begin through all the years of children's lives in elementary and secondary schools.

PROVIDER'S CORNER

Joan Dell, Group Day Care Home provider from Isabella County recently wrote to us.

Like so many other day care providers, I did not want to have a furnace check because of the charge. But if not for this inspection once a year, I would not have discovered a problem. In the past my furnace was always given a good report and this time there was nothing to suspect, but of course we had to have the inspection for our license renewal. The furnace man took one look at it and told us it had to be shut down because of what appeared to have been an explosion inside which could have sent deadly fumes at any time.

This furnace was fifteen years old but never had any problems before other than the pilot light going out at times. I now cannot stress enough how important these checks are. Not only did it save my family's life; it also could have saved the lives of our children in our care.

Thank you for having this rule.

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COMMUNICATION "NO NO'S"

1. **Waiting until the baby begins to talk before deliberately trying to stimulate language.** Children will learn language eventually, but they learn it easier and faster when caregivers deliberately plan for it from the beginning.
2. **Talking in the presence of the baby rather than directly to him or her.** Babies treat this as so much background noise and are unable to make sense of this verbalization.
3. **Making stimulating sessions too long.** Watch for the child's interest. Include language in ordinary events. Begin with many 2-3 minute sessions and expand the time only as the interest of the baby increases.
4. **Failing to connect the object with the word.** For example use real balls of various sizes and textures when you are naming balls. Point to a ball while you say the word so the child begins to understand that the word applies to each instance of a ball, not only to a specific familiar one.
5. **Failing to note signs of ear infections.** Children with repeated ear infections during the first year are usually speech delayed simply because they couldn't hear you. Sometimes these infections are not serious medical problems, but they are serious in terms of language delay. Avoid propping bottles, as milk drips into the middle ear and can cause infection.

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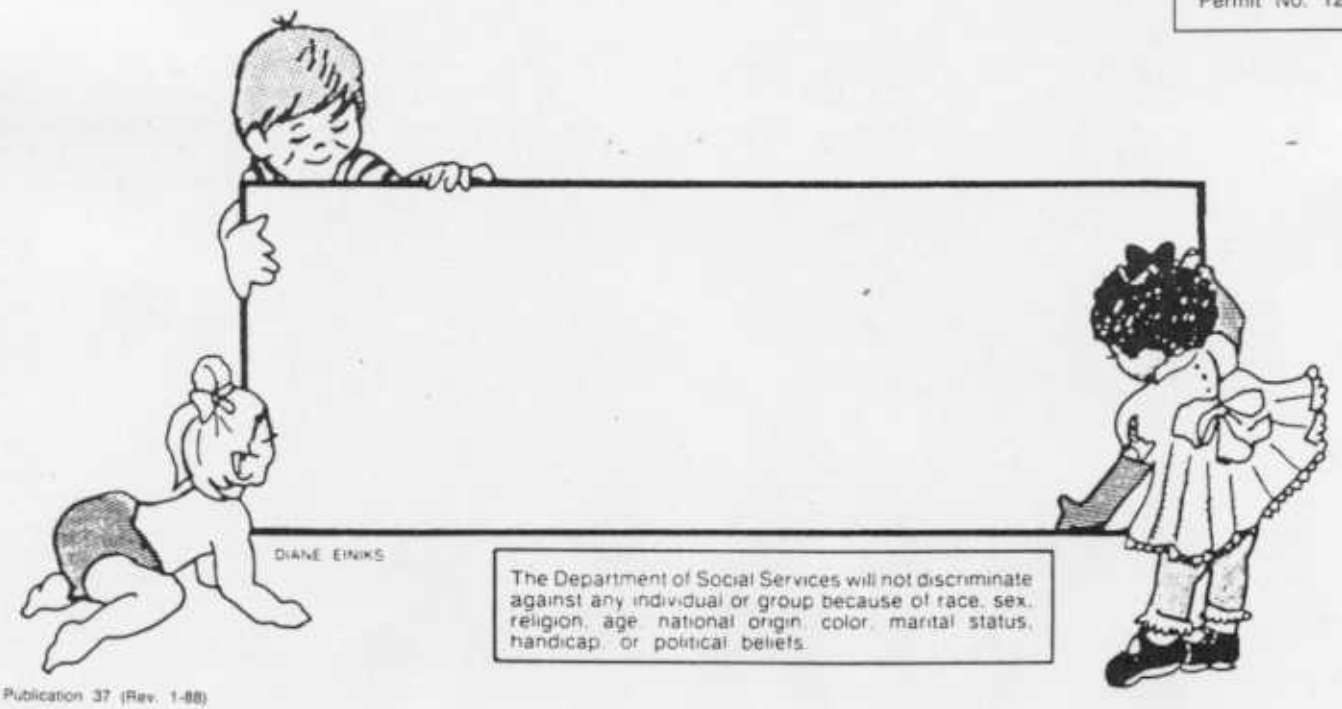

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